

ISLAMIST MILITANCY AND YEMEN'S INTERNAL STRUGGLES

A Look at the Writings of Yemeni Colonel Abd-al-Wali Al-Shumairy

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The United States military must focus on the study of small conflicts that raged from the Soviet-Afghan Wars to the present. These wars on the surface appear tribal, internal and political, but from internal chaos are opportunities for transnational terrorists. Another phenomenon is the creation of popular fronts that are not political or revolutionary but merely mercenary. These are far cries from the bipolar world of the Cold War. Today's complexities involve Islamist militants that appear in unlikely places, such as the West African diamond markets or quietly acquiring technology in East Asia.

On May 22, 1990, North Yemen reunified with communist South Yemen. But the unification was shaky, and the Marxists had spent several years collecting weapons and organizing to effectively control Yemen. The communists also engaged in raging battles with Islamist militants over the direction a unified Yemen would take. Add to this complexity returning Yemenis who are veterans of the Soviet-Afghan War, and a proliferation of small arms and assault weapons that leaves three weapons for every man, woman, and child in Yemen. Another aspect that makes Yemen an attractive base of operations for Islamist militants is a thriving drug trade in the stimulant plant called "Qat."

It is vital that U.S. military planners look into Arabic and scarce English texts on the conflicts that Yemen has experienced in its



modern history. This essay will demonstrate the integral role Islamist radicals have played in Yemen's conflicts. Yemen remains a useful model in studying how regimes on the Arabian Peninsula handle their internal conflicts using Islamist militants.

The most definitive book on the 1994 Yemen Civil War in the Arabic language is a difficult to obtain two-volume set by Yemeni Colonel Abd-al-Wali Al-Shumairy titled *Harb Alf Sa'ah Milhamah Al-Wihdah Al-Yamaniyah (The 1,000-Hour War: Reflections on Yemeni Unification)*. Al-Usr Library published an updated second edition in 1995 in the Yemeni capital Sana'a. This book will be used as the primary Arabic source for this study along with English books and articles. It will highlight the perspectives of a Yemeni

intellectual on the recent Civil War of the 1990s.

The United States takes interest in Yemen because of the strategic maritime choke point of the Bab-el-Mandab Strait, because Yemen is the ancestral home of Usama Bin Laden, and because of the Hadramaut Mountains which still contain extremist Islamist militant cells that threaten U.S. interests in the region. Al-Qaeda affiliates in Yemen have also been innovative in their methods of attack, such as maritime attacks on the USS *Cole* (DDG-67) and French tanker *Limburg*. Yemen is also where American John Walker Lindh was radicalized and joined the Taliban cause. Furthermore, Ramzi Bin Al-Shibh, who attempted to enter

the United States and become one of the September 11th hijackers, hailed from Yemen as do many Al-Qaeda leaders and detainees. It is estimated that Yemenis make up the third largest national representation in Al-Qaeda after Egyptians and Algerians, according to Jonathan Schanzer in his article "Yemen's War on Terror," which appeared in the Summer 2004 issue of the Foreign Policy Research Institute's journal *Orbis*. Understanding Yemen's history is vital to American military policymakers who are crafting means in which to counter Islamist militant groups.

1799-1934: Aden Becomes Vital to the Great Powers

A critical year in the Islamic world is

Glossary of Acronyms, Terms, and Personalities Which Aid in Understanding Yemen's Wars

ACC: Arab Cooperation Council, an Iraqi proposal prior to the 1990 Gulf War to economically tie Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Yemen as a counterweight to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Ali Al-Beidh: Last president of communist South Yemen and from 1990 to 1994 was vice president of a unified Yemen. Led the 1994 war for South Yemen to secede from North Yemen and lost. Was exiled in Oman.

Ali Abdallah Al-Saleh: Current president of Yemen.

Abdel-Majid Al-Zindani: Islamist and jihadist force in Yemen, co-founder of the Islah (Islamist) Reform Party, leader of the Islamic radical Al-Iman University in Yemen's capital Sana'a. U.S. Treasury Department Specially Designated Terrorist.

Asir (Province): Southwestern Saudi province bordering Yemen, its regional capital is the city of Abha.

Bin Rashids: Pre-World War I tribal confederation in Northern Arabia bordering Iraq with their capital in Hail. They were backed by the Ottoman Empire and were defeated by the Al-Sauds after World War I.

Bin Saud: The current Saudi ruling family.

DPRY: Democratic People's Republic of Yemen established in 1972 and lasted until 1990. It is the only communist Arab state to ever exist.

Fatwa: Religious ruling that carries the weight of an edict in some circles and is based on following what an Islamic religious law specialist decrees in order to settle a question where Islamic jurisprudence is unclear.

FLOSY: Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen, a movement and militia established to eject British forces from Aden and South Yemen. This evolved into the DPRY.

GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council, an economic and security arrangement that ties Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

GPC: General People Congress is the ruling party in Yemen.

Hamiduddin Dynasty: A branch of the Al-Qasimi Dynasty that ruled Yemen since 1591, the Hamiduddin branch formed its own dynasty with the support of European rulers in 1918. Yemen's monarchy ended in 1962 in a coup that led to a five year civil war.

Hashemite Dynasty: Descendants of Prophet Muhammad, they ruled Arabia's western coastal province of the Hijaz from the holy city of Mecca from 1916 to 1925 when they were defeated by Bin Saud. The only remaining remnants of the Hashemite Dynasty are the King of Jordan and those former

descendants of Iraqi monarchs when Iraq came under Hashemite rule from 1921 to 1958 and who are now in exile.

Hashids: Yemeni tribal confederation of which the current president branch is allied with.

Imam Badr: Last monarchic ruler of Yemen ascended and was deposed in 1962.

Imam Yahya: Yemen's absolute ruler from 1948 to 1962.

Iman University: Islamic radical university in the capital of Sana'a, a hotbed of jihadist recruitment in Yemen.

Ikhwan: Ultra-conservative and fanatical shock troops used by Bin Saud in his conquest and consolidation of modern Saudi Arabia.

Islah: Islamist political party in Yemen, literally means reform. Goes by the acronym YRP for Yemen Reform Party.

Khedive: Egyptian viceroy who governed Egypt, Arabia and the Levant for the Ottoman Sultan.

Madrasah: Literally school but also denotes a religious school.

Mohammed Ali Al-Idrissi: Led a revolt against British policy of disarming Yemeni tribesmen that cascaded into the 1962 revolution.

Qat: A narcotic stimulant from the Catha edulis plant chewed in Yemen and Somalia, Djibouti and other countries in East Africa.

Salafi: Fundamentalist and another term for Wahabi, literally return to the way of the founders of Islam (Salaf Al-Sahih).

South Arabian Federation: Formed in 1959 as a federated consortium of South Yemen's princes, sultans and tribal confederations. It ended in 1967 with the rise of Marxists in Yemen.

Takfir: Apostasy, declaring one an apostate.

Tarbiyah Schools: Schools for Islamic conduct, a Yemeni word for Islamic school madrasah.

Wahabism: An extreme form of Hanbali Sunni Islam founded in the 1740s and use as a political movement for the Bin Sauds.

YAR: Yemen Arab Republic refers to North Yemen and also Yemen during the 1990 reunification.

YRP: Yemen Reform Party also called Islah (Reform) is the Islamist party in Yemen.

YSP: Yemen Socialist Party, brought together Yemen's Marxists, communists, nationalists and secularists. Was the ruling party of communist (South) Yemen and was disbanded in 1994 after their failed attempt to secede from North Yemen.

Zeidis: A Shiite Muslim minority in Yemen.

1798; this is when Napoleon's expeditionary force invaded Egypt and easily defeated what was the crown jewel of the Ottoman Empire. The French also threatened Britain's access to its possessions and interests in India. In 1802, the British East India Company took over two islands in the southern Red Sea that straddled the strategic Bab el-Mandab Strait. Over the course of six years it became apparent these islands could not support a garrison force, and in 1808 the British negotiated with the Sultan of Lahj to gain access to the sleepy port town of Aden that was at the time one of the best natural ports in the Middle East. In 1838, two powers began vying for control of Aden; the Ottoman Sultan

had tasked his khedive (Egyptian viceroy) to assert control over Yemen. London also began debating sea-lanes of communication and determined that Aden was of significant strategic importance comparing it with the Gibraltar Strait as vital to British mercantile and seafaring interests. This led to a confrontation as a vacillating Sultan of Lahj faced Egyptian troops landing in Yemen and British forces bombarded port towns that threatened their port facilities in Aden. The Sultan of Lahj accepted a more permanent status of his province under British dominion.

The Sultan of Lahj did not rest on his laurels; through British payments he used the capital to co-opt tribes extending into the



William Henry Jackson, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Photographer William Henry Jackson photographed the Port of Aden in December 1894.

Asir province. In 1910, the British stimulated a revolt against the Ottomans in Asir under the leadership of Mohammed Ali Al-Idrissi. This would foreshadow the infamous Arab Revolt of the Hashemites by five years, a revolt which made Lawrence of Arabia famous. In the vacuum of power left by the Ottomans and Egyptians in Arabia arose the Sherief of Mecca (The Hashemites in the Hijaz), Imam Yahya Bin Hamiduddin (Northern Yemen), the Idrissis (Northeast Yemen), Bin Saud (Central Arabia) and Bin Rashids (Northern Arabia) and the Sultan of Lahj (Aden and Southern Yemen) who dominated the Arabian Peninsula. The sheikhdoms and emirs of the Persian Gulf coast are intentionally left out of this study, as they would not play any significant part in the struggle over Yemen until after 1990. The British used this competition between tribal confederations to assert dominance on the peninsula, concluding 31 treaties with Arabian emirs and sultans in southern and eastern Arabia.

The Idrissi revolt affected the port of Hodeidah and on the eve of the revolt which took place during World War I, an accepted patronage from England and Italy saw a diminishing Ottoman power from its ascendance in East Africa. The Ottomans had issued a jihad against foreigners and their allies in Arabia and although it was not successful in Mecca, Medina and in central Arabia, it found resonance in Yemen. Ali Said Pasha was so successful in radicalizing the tribes for the Ottoman cause that he was able to push British forces into the enclave of Aden. The tactic that

defeated Ali Said Pasha was the use of Imam Yahya who argued that Yemen was not for the British or Ottomans but the Arabs. Arab nationalism eroded Ali Said Pasha's (an Ottoman) influence and saw England supporting a treaty with Imam Yahya as monarch of Yemen, which concluded in 1920. Factors that drove Imam Yahya to accept Aden as a British protectorate were:

■ The encroachment of Ibn Saud, whose fanatical Wahabi Ikhwan shock troops

defeated the Hashmites of Mecca and attacked Yemen.

■ Bin Saud had taken Asir province. (The root of the struggle between Bin Saud and Imam Yahya is at its core a religious one. The Saudis are Wahabi Sunni Muslims; the Imam of Yemen was a Shiite Zeidi.) Today's borders in the Arabian Peninsula be it Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq or Yemen were imposed by British guns from its fleet and planes threatening the forces of Bin Saud.

■ British biplanes bombed and strafed Yemeni tribes threatening the Zeidi Shiite tribal minority in Yemen and also used airpower to evict Imam Yahya's forces from Aden leading the Imam to agree to a protectorate over his realm in 1934.

1954-1967: Nasserists and Marxists Explode in Yemen

Yemen was not immune to self-determination movements that cropped up after World War II in Africa and Asia. Britain came away from its triumph over Hitler with staggering debt and could no longer maintain protectorates like Aden. In 1954, the Governor General of Aden invited the South Arabian emirs and potentates to redraw the protectorate arrangements of Southern Arabia. In 1959, they formed the South Arabian Federation made up of seven entities (The British Protectorate of Aden along with Beihan, Al-Dalaa, Al-Fadhly, Auzly, Yafei and Awaleq). Despite the agreement reached by these sultanates and emirs, the Yemeni army and intelligentsia educated in the universities of Cairo and Beirut saw this arrangement in the context

of Nasserism and the Algerian struggle for independence from France. The South Arabian Federation was just another means of British colonization, particularly since the federation included the British Protectorate of Aden. Their frustration was also compounded by the despotic rule of Imam Ahmed (a descendant of Imam Yahya), and this exploded into a revolt in September 1962 on the eve of Iman Badr's ascension to the throne.

The answer from London to attacks on Yemeni allies was to disarm the tribes, which only made matters worse and caused tribesmen to take to the Ridfan Mountains. British forces responded with a combined air and mechanized infantry assault on the Ridfan Mountains to smoke out the guerilla leader Ghaleb Bin Rajeh Labuzah, who did not comprehend revolutionary politics but was angered over British disarmament policy. The Labuzah revolt of 1962 caused an incitement of more tribes, and in late 1962 early 1963, Arab nationalists and Nasserists took over the revolt. Labuzah brought together factions including Islamic fundamentalists with their jihadist fighters from the Yafei and Al-Dalaa tribal confederation and nationalist revolutionaries who formed the Nationalist Front committed to getting British forces out of Aden.

Egypt extended aid and support to the National Front (also called Septemberists). Joining the Yemeni uprisings were Palestinians such as George Habbash and Nayef Hawatmeh, who had met while college students in Beirut and become advisors to Yemeni Marxists and nationalists. Four anti-British groups emerged:

- ☐ Popular Socialist Party,
- ☐ Sons of Southern Arabia,
- ☐ National Union Party, and
- ☐ Nationalist Front.

Egypt's fiery leader Gamal Abdel-Nasser's interest in nurturing revolution in Yemen was designed to evict the British from Aden and topple old style Arab monarchies, which the Imam Badr represented. This alarmed the Saudis, and it is not a coincidental mistake that the World Muslim League (*Rabitat Al-Alam Al-Islami*) was formed in 1962 as a response to the republican uprising in Yemen. The

republicans had several demands among them: democracy and the nullification of all British treaties with Yemen's sheikhs and sultans.

Egypt began at first arming, and then extended military and financial aid to the Republican officers that swept away Imam Badr on September 26, 1962. The Imam took to the hills of Northern Yemen to foment and undertake tribal levies and fight the army officers that removed him from power. This civil war between the Imam (royalists) and army revolutionaries (republicans) lasted from 1962 to 1967 and would evolve into Egypt's Vietnam absorbing 60,000 Egyptian troops. The war would see Egypt supporting the republicans (led by Colonel Abdallah Sallal) and Saudi Arabia, Israel, France, Jordan and Britain supporting the royalists (led by Imam Badr and his uncle Prince Hassan). As the struggle raged, Egypt resorted to bombing the Saudi logistical center of Najran and also used chemical weapons in a desperate attempt to demoralize royalist guerillas and tribes.

In 1965, a convention to reconcile ideological differences of the National Front was convened in Sana'a; this would be a turning point as the republican movement split into Nasserist, Marxist, Democratic, Socialist, and Baathist factions. While republicans focused on winning the war in North Yemen, the leftists supported by Egypt, split away from the Nationalist Front and formed a Liberation Front focusing their efforts in Aden; this evolved into Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY).

Clandestine contacts were made between FLOSY and the Soviet Union via the Sudanese Communist Party. The Sudanese Communists provided a link to Arab nationalists in Cairo and Moscow, providing FLOSY millions of dollars in clandestine Soviet military aid. The leaders of Yemen's communist movement and their Arab communist backers saw themselves as a third alternative, a rejection to the Nasserist trend that overtook Egypt and Baathism that overtook Iraq and Syria. Egypt attempted to control the whirlwind hosting a series of conferences between the National Front and FLOSY in Alexandria, Egypt, and in Yemen.

1967-1974 Islamist Radicals Fight Communism in Yemen

When one analyzes how jihadism entered the struggle for power in Yemen, three incidents must be highlighted. The first was the crushing defeat of Arab armies in the daring Israeli aerial attack on Egypt, Syria and Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War. The defeat was so decisive it called into question the validity of Arab nationalism and Egypt's Pan-Arab vision represented by Nasser. This drew thousands away from such Pan-Arab ideologies towards the slogan "Islam is the solution" to socio-political problems. This is the period when Al-Qaeda ideologue Ayman Al-Zawahiri threw himself into jihad as the only solution to problems in the Arab world. Arabs flocked to mosques for answers and a few towards Islamist radical groups like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The second is the use of Islam to fight Nasser's troops in Yemen and Republican Yemeni forces from 1962-1967. The third was when FLOSY evicted British forces and declared Aden the first and only communist nation in the Arab world. The Democratic People's Republic of Yemen (DPRY) was created in 1967. The

communist Yemenis immediately set about liquidating hundreds of clerics and imams. Many died in brutal ways including dragging their live bodies through the streets of Aden, Lahij, and other towns in southern (communist) Yemen on the back of vehicles. Yemenis were indignant by the closure of the Islamic University in Aden. The republicans in Sana'a saw in this outrage an opportunity to support Islamist insurgents to destabilize the communist south. The Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood called on members from the Arab world to come to Sana'a and fight a jihad against the atheist Yemeni communist regime in the south. This would be a foreshadow of how the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would be fought seven years before it occurred. Many of the *Ulama* (Islamic clergy) in North Yemen fled to the city of Taiz, where they established a base of Islamist resistance against communism. This echoes what occurred in Peshawar in Pakistan during the Soviet-Afghan War. The Yemeni Islamic resistance groups were led by the fiery cleric Sheikh Abdel-Mejid Al-Zindani, leader of the Yemeni faction of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Arabic sources describe the complex internal struggle Yemen's ideological factions (nationalist, communist, islamist and baathist) and the gradual formation of two major factions before the two Yemen's split in 1967. The ideological struggle settled on Marxism in the south and Islamism in the north. In 1969, an internal communist (Yemeni) struggle revolved around implementation of the Maoist (agricultural) model or the Leninist (industrial) model. This communist divide was settled in favor of Moscow versus Beijing but would be a source of tension and sow the seeds for a potential coup in later years.

By 1972, the north and south fought skirmishes along the border and undertook guerilla strikes in urban centers. Despite claims and counter-claims including false accusations of the Saudis stimulating the north to attack the south, it turned out that the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR-North) Majlis Al-Shura (parliament) had made a conscience decision to reunify the north and south by force. In 1974, seizing on the chaos, 30-year-old Lieutenant Colonel Ibrahim Al-Hamdi took power in North Yemen in a military coup. Important aspects of Al-Hamdi's regime was that he had leveraged the expulsion of Soviet advisors from Egypt in 1973 and the military focus of Moscow on Aden into a \$138 million arms deal with the U.S., which was to be financed by the Saudis. Accepting Saudi money meant that Al-Hamdi had given up Yemen's autonomy and spent a great deal of time reclaiming Sana'a independence from Riyadh. Accepting Saudi funds also meant an increased level of Wahabi evangelism and Al-Hamdi could never ignore the cold fact that Saudi funds helped him maintain central control of the tribes and at the end the tribes were more loyal to Saudi money than his own authority. What brought Al-Hamdi to power in June 1974 was a stepped up attack by southern communist insurgents on the north to include assassinations of republican government officials and officers in Sana'a as well as bombings of urban centers. Al-Hamdi responded by cultivating the Islamist movement and the Muslim Brotherhood as an easy means of financing a proxy army against communist infiltrators. He allowed more control by the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists and Wahabis to create schools, preach incitement against communism in the mosque and conduct guerilla attacks in Aden

and throughout South (communist) Yemen. Like Afghanistan, no central government could control the well-armed tribes. Yemen is a perfect breeding ground for Islamist militancy then and now.

Sheikh Al-Zindani represented the new force in North Yemen's politics. As leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, he and such Islamist clerics as Imam Yahya bin Fahseel created jihadist guerilla units that incited, terrorized, assassinated and evangelized in communist South Yemen. Al-Zindani's *Tarbiyah* Schools became the forerunner of the madrassahs in Pakistan and gave the Muslim Brotherhood a steady stream of recruits. Complicating matters was Saudi assistance and the discovery of Algerian president Houari Boumediene providing intelligence to communist Yemen. Al-Hamdi wanting to free his nation from Saudi dominance began in 1977 exploring rapprochement with the communist DPRY government in Aden. In October 1977, a few hours before traveling to Aden to begin talks on potential unification he was assassinated. It was never determined who was responsible. Previous attempts on Al-Hamdi included a failed assassination by Major Zaid Kasbi, a new convert to militant salafism after being disappointed by Nassrism. In June 1978, his successor Ahmad Al-Ghashmi was brutally assassinated by his southern-DPRY counterpart Salem Rubbiyah, when he sent him an envoy suicide bomber that killed himself and Al-Ghashmi. The Central Communist Committee of South Yemen discovered Rubiyyah's plans to undertake a revolution to return the DPRY to a Maoist form of communism and unify Yemen by force. They had Rubiyyah killed.

Arabic sources from North Yemen blame the KGB, East German Stasi for the urban bombings and assassination campaigns in the North. Al-Ghashmi's assassination saw the ascension of the current president, former Colonel Ali Abdullah Al-Saleh in 1978. From 1972 to 1979, the communist South launched three major invasions of the North. In that time, Libya, Cuba, China, USSR and East Bloc nations supported the DPRY and the Gulf nations, U.S., NATO allies supported the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR).

1979-1989 Jihadist Yemeni Islamists Fight in The Afghan War

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What is fascinating about the Soviet-Afghan War is that it globalizes Islamist militancy. For the first time Egyptians, Algerians, Saudis, Yemenis and all Arabs who fought in Afghanistan shared a common experience in fighting the Soviet Army. It was a convenient way to dump troublemakers while fighting communism. The Soviet-Afghan War was a conflict made for jihad, the Cold War, and Arab governments eager to rid themselves of agitators and violent militants.

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From the Yemeni perspective, Southern Yemenis, who chafed under the communist yoke, were eager to have a crack at the superpower that enabled their oppressive regime to exist. Many of these veterans returned to Yemen and formed what would become known today as the Islamic Army of Aden (IAA), an Al-Qaeda affiliate. One of the best chapters that explains the evolution of the Islamic Army of Aden appears in Jonathan Schanzer's book *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups and the Next Generation of Terror* (Washington DC: Brookings Press, 2004). The Yemeni veterans of the Soviet-Afghan War returned intoxicated with victory and were convinced that the fall of the Soviet Union was due to their efforts. Many settled in both North and South Yemen and set about building para-military training camps and preparing for violence against the regime.

The days of the Democratic People's Republic of South Yemen were numbered; no longer sponsored by the Soviets, their

only salvation was for Ali Al-Beidh, the communist chairman, to seek unification with Sana'a. Another problem that would hasten the collapse of DPRY was best expressed by Sanaa's governor about the importation of weapons from 1967 to 1994 into Yemen, which left three guns for every Yemeni citizen — more than 80 million firearms. The gun has replaced the *jambiyah* (curved Yemeni dagger) as an inextricable part of Yemen's masculine culture. In addition, similar to the Pakistan-Afghan border that has a thriving weapons industry, the Yemeni economy thrives on being a weapons shopping bazaar for East and Central African nations.

Aside from establishing paramilitary groups, the Afghan veterans also allied themselves with a new political entity in North Yemen. The *Islah* (Reform) Party, is the second most popular party after the regime's General Congress Party, but one could argue that *Islah*, an Islamist Party, is the core constituents of Yemen's current president. Formed by Shiekh Al-Zindani, who was head of the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen, and a specially designated terrorist by Washington, *Islah* is an islamotribal party founded in 1990. Al-Zindani, the cleric, and Hussein Al-Ahmar, leader of the Hashid Tribal Confederacy (the same tribe of the president), would bring together Islamist radical, tribal, and influence into Yemen's political landscape. It is estimated 20 percent of the *Islah* Party has ties to Islamist militant groups including Al-Qaeda. This group would be very useful during Yemen's 1994 war of succession.

Other developments not directly related to the Soviet-Afghan War but occurred during the decade long conflict was Yemeni military power projection. Based on a 1987 request of Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi, Yemeni leader Ali Abdullah Al-Saleh sent a few hundred troops to Libya to aid in the Chad conflict, which Libyan forces were losing. Yemeni forces fought alongside Libyans in Chad from 1987-1990, the Yemeni military presence rose from a few hundred to one division. In 1989, the issue of the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) was brought forth by Iraqi despot Saddam Hussein. In hindsight, this was a ruse by Saddam to focus Arab attention from his invasion of Kuwait, garner Arab alliances, and add pressure to

the Gulf Cooperation Council into forgiving billions in debt accumulated over the decade long Iran-Iraq War. To the Yemeni socialists this was seen as an opportunity to check the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalists in Yemen by joining in a socialist-baathist alliance. Operation Desert Storm and Egypt's lack of enthusiasm for the ACC killed this project proposed by Iraq's despot for establishing collective links with Yemen, Egypt, and Syria.

1990-1993 Unification and Constitutional Crisis

Among the more important aspects of Yemen's current political history is the unification on May 22, 1990, of North and South Yemen. What is significant was how the tribal, Islamist, democratic and Marxists reconciled their differences to ensure that Yemen did not split apart. This would be short-lived and secession occurred in 1994.

Soon after the 1990 unification, communist Yemenis led by former DPRY President Ali Al-Beidh, who under unification became Yemen Arab Republic vice president, looked into several issues to check the growing influence of Islamist militants and their Islah Party. Among the concessions granted to Al-Beidh:

- ☐ Retaining the military formations and defense establishments of South Yemen, and
- ☐ Keeping the socialist constitution and the use of secular ideals to check Islamist radicals and militants.

Amazingly it was not the retention of the military assets in the South that was opposed by Shiekh Al-Zindani but the issue of the constitution that rankled him and his Islamist radicals in Yemen. Al-Zindani organized street violence and opposition to the constitution and felt this would distance his vision of forming an Islamist state in Yemen. The matter involved street violence and was resolved by a constitutional referendum in May 1991 in which out of 1.8 million ballots cast, 1.3 million voted for the constitution. This aspect of Yemen's political history is very revealing as it shows the jihadist and Islamist radicals fear of constitutional governance; it also demonstrates the majority of Yemeni citizens both in the North and South wanted representative government. The next struggle that would lead to the 1994 Yemen War of Secession dealt with movements and control over the armed forces, trade, and diplomacy.

According to Arabic sources, Vice President Beidh began a consolidation of the armed forces designed to protect his political parties. Special forces, infantry and armored divisions were moved around Yemen and positioned based on reliability. In addition, the Marxists controlled diplomatic appointments and shaped Yemen's foreign policy more than the North. Technically in 1990, North and South were united, but factually the nation was still divided with Marxists guarding their interests. Another point of contention was the control of the lucrative weapons market. Between 1990 and 1994, Yemen cleared its arsenals of antiquated small arms and light assault weapons selling them to militias in Somalia, no doubt complicating Operation Restore Hope and the United Nations mission in Mogadishu. They also sold to Saudi, Omani tribesman, and arms merchants. Among the threats to the former Marxists was Shiekh Al-Zindani and his Islamist Islah Party. In September 1993 the Marxists attempted and failed to

assassinate Al-Zindani at his home, and there was also a failed attempt to kill President Saleh's brother using explosives.

When looking into U.S. military operations in Somalia, the focus is on that country and not peripheral nations that served as a support base for Operation Restore Hope. The agreement by President Saleh to allow U.S. forces access to Aden in support of operations in Somalia set off a fascinating political battle between Saleh and Vice President Beidh. Beidh wanted to demonstrate that President Saleh did not have the right to provide Aden as a base for U.S. forces and was outraged that his Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) apparatus and security were not charged with protecting U.S. troops in Aden. The Yemeni vice president was bolstered in his claims when terrorists conducted near simultaneous bombings of the Movenpick and Gold Mohur hotels, where U.S. forces were billeting in 1992. The former Marxist and Socialist apparatus took charge of the investigation but had their own agenda to embarrass President Saleh and undermine Islamist militants, who were the main suspects of the bombings. This may explain why the perpetrators of this attack were never brought to justice. YSP worked with the Egyptian socialists to identify and undermine Islamists in Yemen. The Egyptian government was willing to take members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad captured in Yemen, but Cairo was frustrated when the Yemenis seized the opportunity to get rid of Egyptian laborers not involved in terrorism.

1994: Yemen War of Secession

The thread of cultural ties unified Yemen in 1990, but cultural and social ties do not guarantee political union. The two Yemens instead of working towards integration in 1990, used the time to undermine one another in a path towards total dominance of Yemen. Through this an opportunity existed for the Islamist Islah Party (aka the Yemen Reform Group or YRG) to begin its own influence on the ruling General Congress Party and seek its own agenda of an Islamist state in Yemen. The Marxist Prime Minister Abu Bakr Al-Attas saw trouble ahead; in June 1990 he warned the unified government and members of his own party that although he welcomed the Muslim Brotherhood in the political process on condition that they ceased calling other political parties at the Yemen Socialist Party kafir's (apostates) and the encouragement of death that comes with it. The impact of Prime Minister Al-Attas observations about *takfir* (declaration of apostasy) would come take shape in a series of assassination of YSP officials from 1991 to May 1994 (the outbreak of the war of secession). This included the use of rockets to attack the homes of YSP officials, despite complains to President Saleh, he blamed the attacks on "foreign elements." Attacks and assassination patterns are revealing and focused on the speaker of the house, members of the judiciary, Prime Minister Al-Attas and Vice President Beidh as well as leaders who were deemed secular. It all had the mark of jihadist target selection to undermine major political figures and schools they feared were secularizing Yemen.

The decision of Vice President Beidh to secede from North Yemen was not taken lightly but was meticulously planned. Before he withdrew to Aden in August 1993, he and his YSP along with their Nationalist and Marxist allies controlled:

- Under half of Yemen's ground forces,

- All coastal patrol forces,
- A bulk of the inventory of Yemen's SCUD missiles,
- A majority of the air force, and
- Six provinces that represented the larger part of Yemen's total land mass.

When President Saleh attempted to score a quick victory by invading Aden, his regular forces found the southern Yemeni forces putting up stiff resistance and using their air force to strafe northern formations advancing on Aden. Saleh turned to supplementing the regular army with tribes and (jihadist) militia. Clerics (through the Islah Party) issued *fatwas* (religious edicts) prohibiting reconciliation with the southern secessionists and sanctioning their killing. This also served to push out the other political parties in Yemen in favor of North Yemen's policy of using force to reunify the country. This in turn, meant a greater reliance by President Saleh on tribe and religion to solve internal crisis. Control of armories was relatively easy in both North and South Yemen, as tribes from such places as the Empty Quarter would show up at government armories and help themselves to the stockpile of weapons. Demonstrating the ease of access to weapons, the YSP before secession uncovered a plot to attack U.S. aircraft using shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles taken from the 10th Air Defense Division. On May 21, 1994, Beidh declared Aden and his six provinces independent. The war lasted until July 1994, with northern forces allied with Islamist jihadist groups tactically making the right choice attacking Aden to remove the center of gravity from power, (Secessionist President Beidh). It was relatively easy for President Saleh to portray Beidh and the socialists as renegades and spoiling the unification of Yemen, which had been an aspiration of the Yemeni people for decades. What characterizes this war of succession was the use of armor, MiGs and the socialist deployment of SCUD missiles against the Yemeni capital Sana'a. In May 1994, the south fired 20 SCUD missiles at Sana'a causing the north to retaliate by firing surface-to-surface missiles at the port city of Aden.

North Yemen triumphed over the

separatists because of several factors which included:

■ **Legitimacy:** North Yemen forces were fighting to keep the country together. This was their central cause and powerful one.

■ **Popular support:** Northern forces had the backing and support of the people, even when they moved into the seceded southern and eastern governorates. Residents of these governorates refused to enlist in the army of the separatists, thus depriving them of a badly needed manpower. Residents also guided the Northern forces to the hideouts and camps of the separatists and showed them where mines and ambushes were prepared.

■ **Financial enticements of YSP troops:** The commanders of the separatist (YSP) forces knew their politicians were receiving generous contributions in cash and arms from some of the neighboring nations (the Saudis). These funds did not filter through to the unit commanders and their soldiers. Using propaganda and financial inducements these forces saw no reason to sacrifice for separatist politicians craving power. On October 14, the Madram, the 56th Infantry, the 122nd Mechanized, the 22nd Infantry, the 4th Artillery camps, as well as the rocket base in Shabwah, all defected. Millions has been paid out to buy the allegiance of unit commanders and their assistants in those camps, as well as to the tribal sheikhs and community elders to facilitate in the advance of Northern forces.

■ **Unity of command:** President Saleh had unity of command and control over northern forces (regular and irregular). The southern separatists had a divided leadership; Beidh escaped Aden early in the war and fled to Oman leaving an ill-prepared Abd al-Rahim Al-Jifri in charge. Tribes loyal to the separatists did not work in tandem with regular forces and a splintered separatist leadership cost them in terms of battlefield performance.

Jonathan Schanzer writes in his book that President Saleh also relied on using Islamist militants as irregular shock-troops in this war of succession. This makes sense, as the Islah Party represented the president's tribe and formed a staunch base of support and the

use of Islamist insurgents against the communist south has a long history in Yemen. The Yemen War of Secession is not politically straight forward; according to *Washington Post* reporter Nora Boustany, Beidh grew tired of relentless political assassinations of his socialists that were likely sanctioned by the government in Sana'a. Her article "POWs in Yemen Hoping for Peace," which appeared in the May 14, 1994 issue, quotes Beidh who remarked that at least 153 of his supporters had been assassinated in Sana'a. The Islah (Islamist) Party viewed the YSP with disdain and abhorred the liberal and secular politics. Many of the YSP members sought asylum in Saudi Arabia as part of the Saudi policy of keeping Yemen divided and weak. There are those academics who argue that had southern Yemen triumphed over President Saleh and the Islah Party it would have been a major defeat for Islamist militants. Yet those who counter these arguments remark that in April 1993, both President Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) and Islah dominated seats in parliament marginalizing the Yemen Socialist Party and Beidh felt compelled to address this erosion of political power through force. Islamist militants used the refugee crisis created by the war to infiltrate the city of Aden, create unrest and put pressure on the city's fragile (secessionist) authorities to keep public order.

What the South Yemen Secessionist Army Did Right

A factor that made a difference in the 1994 Civil War was airpower. At the opening of the war, the south had air supremacy and used it to counter North Yemen's numerical superiority. The secessionist south had 120 combat aircraft and the north had only 60 MiGs and 12 F-5Es. The south's air superiority was quickly eroded by their use of the air force as its main arm against Sana'a and experienced losses to anti-air fire. The largest and most successful air attack was against an oil refinery across from Aden harbor. The south concentrated not on attacking cities but in dulling the mass formations of northern armor using MiG-29s and Mi-24 helicopter gun ships. The North had no attack helicopters.

Regional Machiavellian Aspects of the 1994 War of Succession

The Yemen Civil War offers a useful lesson in the complex and often surprising web of alliances and interests of different Arab states. Saudis at first glance may want to see pro-Islamist, tribal and conservative north defeat the secular and Marxist south. Yet the Saudis placed a higher value on a divided Yemen and backed Beidh and the secessionist government in Aden. Riyadh also wished to even the score for President Saleh's support of Saddam Hussein during the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The Saudis pressed hard for a cease-fire to give time for the south to stabilize itself. Egypt and United Arab Emirates shared the Saudi view but for different reasons. A divided Yemen was seen as a means of undermining President Saleh and his growing sympathy for jihadists that threatened Egypt and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members. Sudan and Iran backed North Yemen against the secessionist south; they coveted a unified Yemen that was estranged from the GCC and purged of liberal secularists such as the YSP. The removal of the YSP would create more political space for the Islamist Islah Party; for Iran it also meant diverting Saudi attention southward. Among inter-Arab and inter-Islamic rivalries, the war of secession in Yemen brought out Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and most GCC nations except Qatar supporting the secular south and the destabilizing states of Iraq (as payment for Yemen's support during Operation Desert Storm), Libya, Sudan and Iran supporting the conservative north.

To understand the impact of Saudi funding of southern (secessionist) Yemen, Jane's Worldwide Arms Deliveries (Report) for 1994 shows that South Yemeni secessionists received 56 T-62 main battle tanks from Bulgaria, seven BMPs, 220mm multiple rocket launchers and 12 MIG-29 "Fulcrum" fighters from Moldova, all of which required funding that Jane's link to the Saudis. With Saudi government support of secessionists, this emboldened the Shiite Zeidi's of the North, who made up most of the officer corps and feared Wahabi influence. The United States worked towards a peaceful reunification of Yemen and refused to recognize the secessionist government despite prodding from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In the Arab world, the U.S. is viewed as a divisive force among Arab states, but America cites this as a clear example of encouraging unity.

The miscalculation of supporting Saddam Hussein so angered Saudi Arabia that they expelled thousands of Yemeni migrant workers which deprived unified Yemen of needed remittances and access to hard currency. It also meant under a million unemployed Yemenis were idle and some ripe for radicalism and influence by Yemen's Islamist militants who thrive under such economic and social instability. While the South postured reliable southern units closer to Aden and towards the approaches to Sana'a, North Yemen used the chaos as a process of moving more and more individual soldiers and officers to units in the South (Aden). Relations between Saudi Arabia and Yemen cannot be viewed only as between the official governments of Riyadh and Sana'a but also in context of alliances between the Saudis and tribal confederations, such as the Al-Ahmar family and Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmar who is leader of the

Hashid tribal confederation in Yemen and co-founder of the islamo-feudalist political party Islah. Charles Dunbar, a noted Yemen scholar, argues that Yemen is still largely a rural country and the Islamist militant movement draws from disaffected youth who are living in the countryside away from the cities. Yemen does not suffer from a large pool of unemployed intellectuals that also serve as middle and top cadre of Islamist militancy in Cairo, Algiers, and Teheran. This observation is debatable as Persian Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia punished Yemen for Iraqi support. This has displaced less than a million Yemeni workers, many returning to Yemen. This creates a climate that Islamist militants have already thrived on as evidenced by the attack on the USS *Cole* and French tanker *Limburg*.

In a previous section of this study, there was a discussion on how Saudi borders were dictated by British naval and air forces intervening against fanatical Saudi Ikhwan shock troops after World War I. Today, one can see a modern version of Saudi hegemony, the Gulf States of Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar as well as Yemen all concern themselves with how much influence Saudi Arabia has politically and economically in the region. Some regional Gulf States make alliances with external powers including the United States to gain a degree of autonomy from Saudi Arabia's political and economic size as well as Iranian encroachment of its brand of religious radicalism in the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia's Yemen policy follows a simple logic and it is to:

- ☐ Keep Yemen neutral, if not leaning towards Saudi policies (checking Arab Nationalism and political liberalization in the Persian Gulf;

- ☐ Keep Yemen weak and divided; and

- ☐ Keep Yemen (especially the North) economically dependent.

In 1994, the Saudi armed forces positioned troops along its border. It is not clear what Saudi military intentions were except posturing to influence the Yemen War of Succession and deal with the possible aftermath of a northern retaliation for Saudi support of the Aden (southern secessionists). From a military vantage point, it would be interesting to deduce who would win in a conflict between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The Yemenis enjoy a harder working and experienced fighters in their armed forces, as well as a larger ground force. However the Saudis have a technological



Department of Defense photo

The USS Cole was attacked October 12, 2000, while it was harbored in the Yemeni port of Aden. Seventeen sailors were killed in the attack.

advantage in such arms as the F-16 and anti-air defense systems. One can speculate about the level of technological competence of the Saudi armed forces and employment of their navy and air force in a war against Yemen. Experience has shown that Yemen bogged down an Egyptian expeditionary force from 1962 to 1967 when the country was divided. In a Saudi-Yemen conflict there is an added complexity of southern Saudi tribes with close tribal ties to their Yemeni counterparts along their common border. In addition, there are Islamist militant elements within Saudi Arabia that are currently actively engaged in insurgent operations throughout the country. If Yemen and Saudi Arabia were to open hostilities, it would likely involve the support of proxy Islamist radicals within Saudi Arabia and Yemen. War gaming and modeling this scenario would be a useful exercise.

Conclusion

Sheikh Al-Zindani continues to influence Yemen's politics and has garnered additional influence in the world of Islamist militancy. A former veteran of the Soviet-Afghan wars, he has contacts with Al-Qaeda, runs the Al Iman University, a hotbed of jihadist education, and also heads the Islah political party. In February 24, 2004, the U.S. Treasury Department designated Sheikh Al-Zindani, a loyalist to Usama bin Laden and supporter of al-Qaeda, a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under the authority of Executive Order 13224 and the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. According to the Treasury Department press release, Al-Zindani served as a contact for Ansar al-Islam (AI), a Kurdish-based terrorist organization linked to al-Qaeda, which is included in the UN 1267 sanctions Committee list. As founder of the Al Iman University in Sana'a, he has more than 5,000 enrollees and counts among his alumni John Walker Lindh (so-called American Taliban) before he joined the Taliban. By understanding how Islamist militancy is an integral part of Yemen's internal struggles, U.S. policymakers can begin to delve into the range of options in the U.S.-Yemen relationship. With this in mind military planners should consider:

1. *Understanding that Islamist militant*

organizations have undertaken a policy of finding a niche as an irregular force multiplier in regional conflicts. This is seen in Yemen, and was seen in such places as Somalia, Sudan, and Afghanistan under the Taliban. Al-Qaeda affiliates bring to local warlords and leaders of lawless regions an option to counter opposition. In the case of Yemen, the jihadists were used to undermine the socialists.

2. *Once jihadists have triumphed over a regional threat, local leaders must be made to understand the next phase is setting up an Islamic government in their image.* This means that with the Yemen Socialist Party gone, it is only a matter of time before Islamist militants begin attacking the ruling General People's Congress. Once a settlement is reached between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, organizations such as Hamas will become the main competitor to control of any new Palestinian state.

3. *Like Mullah Omar in Afghanistan who refused to give up Osama Bin Laden for a variety of financial, marital and military ties, the current Yemeni regime refuses to give up Sheikh Al-Zindani because his Islah Party is an umbrella that gives power to the ruling president's tribe as well as Islamist militants.* Al-Zindani, like any politician, knows the balance keeps the Yemeni government powerless to apprehend him.

4. *The use of proxy Islamist militant fighters is not only restricted to the history of Afghanistan, Somalia and Kashmir but is predated by conflicts in Yemen.* Al-Qaeda uses the historical precedent of the internal struggle in Yemen as one of several models to have a growing encroachment on a weak central government.

5. *Islamist militant groups will oppose any constitution that guarantees the rights of all citizens despite a majority wanting constitutional governance.* In the early '90s Yemen voted by a margin of 98 percent to have constitution that would unify secular southern and northern conservatives in Yemen. Sheikh Al-Zindani and his Islamist radicals used mob violence to dissuade the public from adopting a constitutional form of government. He failed, but his zeal can be seen today in dealing with suicidal jihadist groups in Iraq who use intimidation to deny

suffrage for Iraqis. This is not a new tactic.

6. *The proliferation of weapons in Yemen has graduated from small arms to armor and missiles.* The 1994 Yemen War of Secession saw both sides firing surface-to-surface missiles and over 20 SCUDS at one another. The future of a Yemen in crisis is possibly the turning of these missiles on international shipping lanes along the strategic Bab-el-Mandab Strait. The denial of the strait would have an impact on Suez Canal traffic and the economies of many nations in the region, not to mention a shock to world oil prices.

7. *Instability in Yemen could invite external powers to intervene such as Sudan and Iran who would prop up any Islamist radical takeover.* Saudi government policy to undermine Islamist militants could be eroded by a Saudi public supportive of Islamist radicals in Sana'a. Unsettled issues between Yemen and Saudi Arabia include the status of the Asir Province, which rages whenever there is stress between the two nations.

8. *Conduct war-gaming if Yemen and Saudi Arabia were to open hostilities and the impact of involving proxy Islamist radicals within Saudi Arabia and vice versa within Yemen in such a conflict.* War-gaming and modeling this scenario would be a useful exercise for U.S. military planners.

9. *Address aggressively the issue of Tarbiah schools.* Tarbiah schools have morphed today into hundreds of unlicensed Islamist schools that are incubators for Islamist militants. In 1992, the government passed a law forcing the closure of unlicensed schools; the law was likely supported by the YSP before the party was destroyed in 1994. The law remains on the books but is not enforced by the current government.

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